

Deskjet printer challenges lasers

The image of your business is reflected in every piece of correspondence you send out. While many businesses would like to laser-print all their correspondence, the cost of such a printer is often too high. Now there's a less expensive alternative: an ink jet printer from Hewlett-Packard called the DeskJet.

The DeskJet, from Hewlett-Packard Co., 1820 Embarcadero Road, Palo Alto, Calif. 94303, is small in size and weighs less than 15 pounds. Yet it sports most of the features of laser printers costing twice as much.

On the other hand, it is inferior in some respects.

Currently HP is offering two models of this printer: the original DeskJet (\$795) and the just-released DeskJet Plus (\$995). Here are some of the features of each that I appreciate:

■ Wide range of fonts and car-



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tridges. The DeskJet has its own family of cartridges and softfonts (fonts stored on diskettes that need to be loaded into the printer's memory). Up to two cartridges can be accessed at a time. The fonts offer type sizes up to 14 points on the DeskJet and 30 points on the DeskJet Plus.

■ Quiet operation. The DeskJet, like laser printers, has whisper-quiet operation that doesn't contribute to office noise pollution.

■ Near laser quality output. With dot matrix printers, the high-end printing mode is often called "near letter quality" — a comparison to the impact letter quality

printers of yore. With the DeskJet, the comparison is "near laser quality" — and it would take a finicky eye to tell the difference.

■ Slick envelope printing. The DeskJet prints envelopes easily. Without disturbing the paper in the in-feed tray, you just coax an envelope between some guides, press a button, and you're set to print. Then, if you're like me, you run a macro that automatically captures the address block from your letter and directs it, properly positioned, to the envelope.

Another unexpected use of the DeskJet is as a traveling printer when high quality output is needed. It can be carried on board an airline.

On the downside, the DeskJet's normal printing speed is only about two pages per minute and the Plus's speed is about four pages a minute.

This compares with 6-12 pages

per minute for various laser printers and even faster speeds for some dot matrix printers. It's designed for only medium volume; the paper tray holds just 100 sheets. And with ink cartridges costing \$19 each and lasting only for about 400 sheets, the cost of operating a DeskJet can mount.

■ The Bottom Line. Despite its faults, this quiet, reasonably priced printer generates crisp text and 300-dot-per-inch graphics. While it's not designed for heavy use and its output will always be a notch below a laser printer, I predict that it will eventually supplant dot matrix printers as the low-cost printer of choice.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.